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THE MORAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CITIZEN AND NATION IN RESPECT
TO THE FUGITIVE SLAVE BILL.

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED APRIL 10, 1851,

On Occasion of the Public Fast,

IN THE

ORTHODOX CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

TOWNSEND, MASS.

BY REV. L. H. SHELDON,
PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

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DISCOURSE.

ISAIAH, 10 : 1, 2.

WOE UNTO THEM THAT DECREE UNRIGHTEOUS DECREES, AND THAT WRITE GRIEVOUSNESS WHICH THEY HAVE PRESCRIBED; TO TURN ASIDE THE NEEDY FROM JUDGMENT, AND TO TAKE AWAY THE RIGHT FROM THE POOR OF MY PEOPLE, THAT WIDOWS MAY BE THEIR PREY; AND THAT THEY MAY ROB THE FATHERLESS!

THIS is called a Christian land. We are called a Christian people. If there be any significance or truth in this epithet, it must lie in the fact that we hold ourselves amenable to a righteous God as our Sovereign; that we regard his revealed will as our supreme rule of duty; that the great and eternal principles of rectitude inculcated by Jesus Christ, in connection with the express commands of Jehovah, are made the foundation of our social, civil, and religious blessings; and that the binding authority of these can never be destroyed. It inheres in their very nature. It is their unchanging equity. And it is this principle that gives power to civil enactments; that renders them obligatory upon the conscience, and creates the moral duty of obedience.

This fact has been recognized or expressly stated by every system of jurisprudence, from the earliest ages to the nineteenth century, which has at all regarded the fundamental principles of morality. Says that most learned of jurists, Blackstone, "The law of nature, being coeval with mankind and dictated by God himself, is of course superior in obligation to any other. It is binding over all the globe, in all countries, and at all times; no human laws are of *any validity* if contrary to this; and such of them as

are valid, derive *all their force* and all their authority, mediately or immediately, from this original." This quotation is sufficient to show the views of the most eminent and standard expositors of law. And he would have been deemed an atheist, or a driveling sciolist, who should have advanced sentiments in conflict with these ! Not that the law of God specifies all the minute particulars in regard to every question of duty ; but it lays down clearly certain broad, comprehensive, and distinct principles, by which thoughtful and serious men may determine the moral character of human action. He that orders his life in accordance with its express teaching, or in harmony with its general spirit, *acts right*. He that sets this at defiance, and regulates his conduct by principles in open conflict with the word of eternal truth, is a *practical* atheist. All the special pleading in the world, all the sophistry of the most subtle and learned mind, cannot gainsay it. The man, or the men, who trample upon the requirements of Jehovah, — no matter how great the provocation, no matter how loud or universal the plaudits of the multitude, — expose themselves to the threatened vengeance of heaven. Neither is it essential whether it be done by the individual or by the nation ; by the man in authority or by the peasant in his hut ; it is at all times, and in all stations, treason against God, and must be visited by a righteous Judge accordingly. No exalted post of honor can sanctify it ; no royal authority ennoble it ; no judicial ermine legalize it.*

As sure as there is an omniscient Sovereign, so sure will he visit such rebellion with unmitigated displeasure. This is the universal teaching of his Word. The text most unequivocally asserts this. "Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees." Says a distinguished biblical scholar, in regard to this passage : "This undoubtedly refers to those who frame statutes that are oppressive and iniquitous ;" those who have intrusted to them the power of enacting laws for the general welfare of the nation, but who so abuse that trust as to violate the express command of God, or the *spirit* of his law. "Woe unto them that write grievousness which they have prescribed." Says the commentator above quoted, "Here, it evidently refers to the judges who declared unjust and oppressive sentences, and caused them to be recorded." I suppose

* "Law is beneficence acting by rule." — *Burke*.

that the woe pronounced by the prophet was directed against that class of public men who, in discharge of their official duties, departed from the general principles of the Divine law, and substituted instead some doctrine of expediency, or principle calculated to subserve certain unjust ends. This seems to be the meaning from what follows: "To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people." The decisions which they make are designed, and have the effect, to pervert justice; to oppress the poor, and deprive them of their inherent and just claims. The word translated "to take away," is commonly applied to an act of robbery and oppression. To take by violence, as in the spoil of battle. "Judges, by their office, are particularly bound to preserve the rights of such persons; and it therefore evinces peculiar iniquity, when they who should be their protectors become in fact their oppressors, and do injustice to them without the possibility of redress. Yet this was the character of the Jewish judges; and for this was the vengeance of heaven about to come upon the land." What has more frequently called down the severe and crushing judgments of God upon a nation, than the manifestation of cruelty and oppression on the part of the powerful towards the weak and defenceless? How common, therefore, the attempt to justify a plain violation of the golden rule, by appealing to some general precept, without noticing its evident limitation. Thus do wicked men and their abettors wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction. By attempting to justify unrighteousness they harden their own hearts, and drag down the moral sensitiveness of the community to the same degrading level as their own.

The chief magistrate of this Commonwealth having appointed this day as a season of fasting, humiliation, and prayer, in view of the sins of this people and nation, especially urging all "to consider, in the spirit of Christianity, the public and private sins of this community," I would call your attention to what now appears to me to be one of the most alarming and heaven-defying sins that has ever stained the fair fame of this Republic.

It is this: *A systematic and mighty effort to destroy the moral sensitiveness of the community to the infinitely superior claim and authority of God's law.*

It is not publicly avowed: so much the more dangerous and alarming the fact. It is done covertly, and often even under a

pretended reverence for the sanctity of the Divine Word. In various parts of this State, as well as throughout the nation, men clothed with the highest civil and judicial power, under the most solemn responsibility, have deliberately entered upon the work of setting human enactments above the law of God; of denying, in the most positive manner, with the bitterest scorn and derision, that there is a higher law than the constitutional edicts of fallible men. Every possible influence is resorted to: the love of power; the pride of rank; the emoluments of office; the promise of gain; the praise of men; everything, which can break the golden link that binds the conscience of man to the throne of God. He must be made to feel that all inquiry stops with the act of legislation. That no man can go beyond that. That whatever be the effect upon man's moral nature, with no questioning, and in silence, must he obey the stern and oppressive mandate of a human tribunal. "All discussion must be stopped; all agitation put down." These must be strangled by arbitrary command, or stifled by obloquy and denunciation. This is a grave charge! Can it be substantiated? I believe it can.

During the recent Congress at the Capitol of this government, an Honorable Senator expressed himself in the following words:—

"The constitution regulates our stewardship; the constitution devotes the domain to union, to justice, to defence, to welfare, and to liberty. But there is a *higher* law than the constitution, which regulates our authority over the domain, and devotes it to the *same* noble purposes. The territory is a part—no inconsiderable part—of the common heritage of mankind, bestowed upon them by the Creator of the universe. We are *his* stewards, and must so discharge our trust as to secure, in the highest attainable degree, their happiness."

Now, one would think that so noble and Christian a sentiment, alike honorable to the heart which conceived it and to the God which it reverences, would have been met by one universal round of applause. That good men, North and South, East and West, would have caught the sound and echoed it, as the unequivocal response of every intelligent, patriotic, and Christian heart. But was it so? The farthest from it possible. Honorable Senators and Representatives, from all parts of the Union, hurled against it their most envenomed shafts. Its author was assailed as though

guilty of high treason. A new crusade was commenced. The man who should attempt to inoculate the public mind with such a deadly virus must face the guillotine. And all this, to elevate in the popular mind the decrees of men above the unbending oracles of Jehovah; to awe the people into the most abject submission to civil enactments which outraged every principle of justice and humanity, and boldly conflicted with the eternal principles of the Divine law. A doctrine, new in this land, is now advanced. We are taught, that the binding authority of law lies in the fact, that the law *exists constitutionally*; not in its *inherent moral equity*. Thus the keynote is struck, and men of smaller calibre catch the sound, and the public press chimes in, and all cater to the same false and infidel position. The attempt to sustain law at the expense of justice, humanity, and religion, does not stop here. Mass meetings are called. Some of the most distinguished and popular speakers harangue the assembly. How do they meet the real question at issue? How do they attempt to calm the agitated feelings of the best portion of the community; the moral and religious; those that regard the laws of God, and mean to abide by their teaching? Not once, so far as I have seen, have they honestly stated the point of conflict. They present a caricature. They attribute sentiments to their opponents, and put words into their mouths, which they know are false. One speaker, referring to this idea, — that the known will of God is to be obeyed before any civil law which conflicts with this will, — ridicules it as an “undefined higher law, of which every man is to be his own expounder, and to act as judge, jury, and executioner.” And, again; as a “new form of moral treason, which assumes, by the mysterious power of an unknown ‘higher law,’ to trample down all law.” Another distinguished speaker, at the same meeting, alludes to this moral sentiment as what “is called, in the *cant of the day*, the higher law.” And, again, “that its real meaning is nullification, repudiation, or abolitionism.” Thus, instead of meeting the issue like high-minded statesmen, like honorable, Christian men, they attempt to divert the public mind from the real difference between themselves and their opponents, by attributing to them, in the first place, what they do not believe and do not teach, and then, by demolishing the man of straw which they themselves have erected. They constantly confound the clear and well-defined

principle of our Puritan ancestry — that the law of God is superior in its claims to the laws of men, and is to be obeyed before all conflicting civil law — with that restless and noisy opposition to all law, both human and divine, which a mere handful of fanatics keep alive. In accomplishing the same purpose, a resolution was passed at a recent county convention in this State, where the law of God is coupled with the higher law of the gambler and the duellist; and he who feels bound by the former, is taunted with being governed by the same principle as that which controls thieves and murderers!

These instances are but a specimen of the attempt now made to break down the moral sensitiveness of the community, to the superior authority of the divine law; to prepare the public mind to receive any civil enactment, which artful and designing men may create, with the most slavish acquiescence. Do you say that these are but hasty and unguarded expressions, called forth by an opposite ultraism? But there are still more astounding evidences of the spirit above named. It has forced itself into our courts of justice, and into the hallowed precincts of the sanctuary! Our judges have turned moralists, and some of our divines have unwittingly adopted a mode of interpreting Scripture, which, if carried out, would make the word of God sanction the abominations of a Nero and the blackest crimes of a Jeffreys. This point will be particularly noticed in a subsequent part of this discourse.

What shall we say of a recent charge of an eminent judge to the Grand Jury, in which he coolly and deliberately advocates and enforces a principle, which makes power in the hands of depraved beings the sole sanction of law; a principle, which, if believed and obeyed, would at once and forever annihilate all distinction between good and evil, virtue and vice. And all this for the express purpose of overcoming the lingering feeling, that, where an edict of man conflicts with the law of God, we are to abide by the latter as a rule of duty. I will quote his own words, that each one may decide for himself.

Says the Judge: “Even those who go to the extreme of condemning the constitution, and the laws made under it, as unjust and immoral, cannot, even upon such an assumption, justify resistance. In their views, such laws are inconsistent with the justice and benevolence, and against the will, of the Supreme Lawgiver; and they emphatically ask, Which shall we obey, the law of man

or the will of God? I answer — *Obey both*. The incompatibility which the question assumes does not exist. Unjust and oppressive laws may, indeed, be passed by human governments. *But if infinite and inscrutable Wisdom permits political society, having the power of human legislation, to establish such laws, may not the same infinite and inscrutable Wisdom permit and require the individual, who has no such power, to obey them?*” Now mark well this new principle in judicial ethics. It is just this. Because God permits government to pass wicked laws, therefore he permits and requires the individual subjects of that government to obey them. We heartily thank the Judge for this frank avowal of his religious belief. The doctrine advanced is barefaced. There is no escape; there is no possibility of a misunderstanding. The point here argued, is the very one which we would set forth in this discourse. The moral obligation of the citizen, in view of the claims of an unjust and wicked law; a law in acknowledged conflict with the law of God. Shall the citizen obey God, or man? And the Judge decides that, even when the civil edict is “inconsistent with the justice and benevolence, and against the will, of the Supreme Lawgiver,” even when it is confessedly so, still, if God “permits political society, having the power of human legislation, to establish such laws,” then must God require the individual to obey them. Therefore, God *requires* men to do what is *inconsistent with his justice and benevolence, and against his will!* If this be not an utter denial of the superiority of the Divine law over human; if it be not a complete reversal of Peter’s declaration, “We ought to obey God rather than men,” then I am unable to understand the meaning of language. Upon this principle, the venerated maxim of our fathers — that “resistance to tyrants is obedience to God” — is worse than false; and every tyrannical edict that has ever issued from the most cruelly oppressive governments, no matter how terribly they conflict with the will of God, should have been obeyed! I confess, my hearers, that I am perfectly astounded at so bold and unblushing an attempt, in this Christian State, by one of her most gifted sons, to confound morality and immorality, justice and injustice; to make the Christian feel that God sanctions all the iniquitous acts of human governments. “Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees.” Hooker has sublimely said, “Of law there can be no less acknowledged than that her seat is in the bosom of God,” but

here it is transferred to national *power*. Here is the authority of law.

Now, when our leading statesmen, and our most learned and eminent jurists; when the judges of our courts, in the calm and unimpassioned charge to the jury, thus deliberately deny the very foundation of the Divine administration; when they thus attempt to obliterate all moral distinctions, to sear and darken the consciences of men, and thus destroy the popular feeling of reverence for the law of God, is it not high time that the pulpit sound the note of alarm, and arouse the people to this most deadly assault upon the authority of Jehovah? This is a legitimate question for the sacred desk. It has to do directly with the sanctity and claims of God's word. It is, then, both our privilege and duty to investigate it. And this, with Divine help, we intend to do.

But there is still one other point in this same charge, so clearly indicating the aim of its author, that I cannot pass it by. Speaking of the friends and opponents of the "Fugitive Slave Bill," he says: "Both are equally sincere, conscientious, and resolute. Which shall yield? Is there no appeal but to force? Yes! And the arbiter must be *society*; organized society, pronouncing its decision through its regularly constituted agents. This is the moral judgment, the *embodied conscience*, of the political community. *To this is not only each individual bound to submit*, but it is a *new and controlling element* in forming his own moral judgment. An act which before may have been innocent, is now criminal." I confess, my friends, I read this statement with the most incredulous astonishment. Could it be that a son of the old Puritans, educated in this Protestant land, and reared amid the stirring associations of Lexington and Concord, Bunker's Hill and Faneuil Hall, to say nothing of the religious influences of the nineteenth century, — could it be, that so eminent a judge would thus deliberately set aside the fundamental doctrine of Protestantism! Man is to give up his own conscience and judgment, enlightened by the gospel of the Son of God, for an "*embodied conscience of the political community*, which is to be a *controlling element* in forming his own moral judgment." We have been taught from our earliest days, and had always supposed, that *God's word* was to be *the controlling element* for every one in forming moral judgment. But it seems that in these days of invention a new discovery has been made.

We have a *new school*, indeed, in morals, to which, I am very happy to say, I do not belong. I greatly prefer good old Calvinism. That man is to take the Scriptures as his rule of duty; or, as it is expressed in our formularies of belief: "This is the only rule of faith and practice." I ask, What is this "embodied conscience of the political community, which is to be a *controlling* element in the formation of moral judgment?" It is the old, exploded notion, that man has not the right of private judgment, but must subject his conscience to the civil or ecclesiastical authority. Whatever they decree is, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, the end of all controversy. It must be enforced, "at whatever cost." It is "final." Now, this doctrine has long been familiar to the Jesuits, but hitherto strange to New England ears. "It has ever been regarded as the most atrocious of the doctrines of Ignatius Loyola." If such a sentiment as this had been proclaimed in the ears of the immortal patriots of '76, their indignation would have known no bounds. How would Adams and Otis, Hancock, Jefferson, and Patrick Henry have received such a charge from an English judge? Would they have calmly received the insult to their judgment and religion which such a sentiment adroitly gives? I fear that even a *Court House in chains* would not have protected the public functionary from an outraged community.

But it also strikes a death-blow to the great principle which sustained all the martyrs who have poured out their blood in obedience to the civil law, rather than yield the right of private judgment. In this land, we repudiate the idea that the *church* has power to regulate conscience. She must submit all her requirements to the test of God's word. What shall we think, then, when we are told, in this official manner, that the *State* is to control individual conscience by its "embodied conscience!" What becomes of the authority of God? Where is his will? Transferred to the statutes of the State. You have only to consult the votes of the popular assembly, which demand one thing this year and just the reverse the next. This year, they decree all theft wrong; the next, with the Spartan, all undiscovered theft a virtue. Thus your rule of morals shifts with every election; changes with every land you visit. What is just to-day, is unjust to-morrow. What is virtue in America, is vice in Rome. Must not that be a desperate case, which demands such casuistry to sustain it? Must

not that community which will endure it have lost the spirit of their fathers, and have passed back into the bondage of the dark ages?

Easily might this discourse be filled with a recital of the evidences, that there is now going forward a determined effort to destroy the moral sentiment of the people in regard to the superior authority of the law of God, and to substitute in its place the edicts of civil tribunals. Having now, as I believe, shown you that there is a necessity for this discussion, I wish to give you, briefly but distinctly, my own views in regard to a point so fundamental in the formation of religious character, and in acting the part of an orderly and worthy citizen. For it is an indisputable fact, that it is the *Christian principle* of this nation which has so long sustained it in its glorious career, and which now prevents it from being dashed upon the rock of Disunion. Then, woe to him who tramples this element under foot; who discards the authority of that law which is the foundation of it.

There are certain facts which are satisfactorily established; at least, to every moral and Christian man. They are as follows:—

First: That there is a God, who is the moral Governor of the universe.

Secondly: That every rational creature is a subject of his government; bound, under all circumstances, to make the Divine will, when discovered, his rule of duty.

Thirdly: That every moral being must learn the Divine will *for himself*, and, knowing it, he can never do *right* when deviating from it.

Now, if these statements are not truths fundamental to the very existence of moral government, then the Bible is a fiction and all religion an imposture. Deny any one of them, and you destroy the foundation of Christianity. You cannot stop short of atheism, if consistent. There is no middle ground. He that plants his feet upon these facts, stands upon a righteous foundation. He that rejects them is adrift in the merciless sea of skepticism. These truths I most solemnly believe. And believing them, I should prove most false to the sacred trust committed to me, and recreant to God, if I failed ever to declare them when the occasion demands. Being persuaded that such a time has arrived, I would now direct your attention to certain obligations, which a belief in these truths enforce upon all.

In considering this point, the question at once arises, How does the authority of God reach the subject? Does he delegate the power of administration wholly to civil government? By no means. He has given to his creatures his own law. He has endowed them with faculties of understanding this law. He has created every man with a conscience, which may approve of what is right and condemn and reject what is wrong. Therefore, when human governments exercise legitimate authority over their subjects, they derive their power from the Supreme Ruler. They have no permission to require what God condemns. And there are many duties devolving upon man as a subject of the Divine government with which the civil ruler has no *right* to interfere. They are the requirements of God. A performance of them, or a neglect of them, does not *necessarily* interfere with the proper discharge of all civil relations. Man is commanded to worship God; to offer up prayer; to clothe the naked; to feed the hungry; to shelter the defenceless; and to do unto others as he would that they should do unto him. Now, if the civil authority assume to be God's vicegerent, and, existing by Divine permission, to have all authority over the conscience of the subject, may it not constantly conflict with the prior claim of God? We all know that there is no higher law than that which requires obedience to the civil magistrate; but at the same time we know, that this is but *one item* of the Divine law. He has given many other laws. With these, the edicts of man may conflict. In such a case, which has the prior claim for obedience upon the subject; God, or the civil ruler? *Both*, he cannot obey. Here is the point which most of those who have labored so zealously in support of human edicts have passed over in silence. They do not meet it as *the* question of all others to be properly understood. There is no controversy in regard to the question, whether the citizen is bound to obey the laws of the land, as a *general truth*. The Bible is full of proof that he is. But the point is, when the civil ruler so transcends his legitimate authority as to require what is manifestly in conflict with the commands of God, does this general rule still hold? Is there not, then, a *higher law*, by which all men are bound? Look at that assembly of rulers at Jerusalem. Before them stand Peter and John, arrested for doing what they believed to be the mandate of Heaven. Yet they have violated the laws of the land. And the

civil authority command them to be silent in regard to those topics which so agitate the public mind, and threaten the peace and stability of the government; those doctrines which so stir up the passions of wicked men, — men who are violating God's law. And what is the notable reply of God's own messengers? "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye!" And they went directly from this tribunal, "which dared not punish them because of the people," to fulfil the same obligations more boldly and powerfully: and yet we are told that, because God permits this civil authority, having the power, to enact this unjust law, therefore "he may require the individual, who has no such power, to obey it!" A principle which elevates the tyrant to the throne of God; which makes right consist in obeying the statute of the land.

We hold such a sentiment to be but little better than blasphemy. We utterly abjure a doctrine so demoralizing in its tendency; so derogatory to the character of God. We have stated certain truths as essential to a moral government. We now ask, Do nations come under laws differing from those which bind the individual? Does the fact, that a civil government consists of a number of men, legally appointed, and authorized to make all necessary laws for the good of the people, sanctify all their legislation, and exempt them from the moral obligation and responsibility which rested upon them while mere citizens? Most certainly not. If they now, in any act of legislation, trample upon the eternal principle of right; if they violate the command of God; if they set up laws in conflict with the whole spirit of the Divine ritual, their decrees are unrighteous, and the woe of God is denounced against them. The requirement is none the less wicked and reprehensible because made by the nation; because it is a law of the land. And if it is a wicked requisition, he who obeys it does wickedly. The President has declared the same truth in a recent message: "The great law of morality ought to have a *national* as well as personal and individual application." Human laws cannot alter the moral character of an act. In the sight of God, an act possessing a moral character is either *right* or *wrong*. If right before legislation, it is after. If wrong before, it remains the same after. For morality is not created by human edicts. Right and wrong are eternal principles in the government of God. If it were not so, how could nations, as

such, be visited by the retributive justice of an avenging Judge? They might bathe in the blood of the innocent victims of their oppression; they might heap up the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, and yet "go unwhipped of justice." But no: thanks to a righteous God, there is no such license to combined power to revel in iniquity with impunity. They are amenable to the same law as the individual. The legislative power, and the people who sustain it, are alike bound to know the will of God, and, learning it, to obey it. If either or both disregard this will, they fall under the displeasure, and subject themselves to the penalty, of his law. Neither is it any more an excuse for the government than for the individual, to say, that "others before us have done the same wrong." It furnishes no justification. If, at any time, the law-making power transcend the authority vested in them as servants of God, and, to carry out their own selfish ends, forsake the eternal principles of rectitude which he has established, and enact cruel and wicked laws, it is undeniably the duty of future legislators to labor earnestly and perseveringly for their repeal; to proclaim openly and boldly the wrong. They should not violently overthrow the whole government; they should not recklessly rush into the terrible conflict of a revolution; but calmly and religiously should they turn the minds of men to the specific wrong, and, in a lawful manner, change the public sentiment in favor of right and justice. This is an obligation imposed upon them by the law of God. For human law proceeds from imperfect and often very wicked men; and it is a very dangerous assumption, that the civil edict is beyond the reach of moral inquiry; that the legislation of a Republic, under the best of constitutions, is *infallible*. I hope we are not yet political papists! But if doctrines lately advanced become the basis of future legislation, we have a despotism as arrogant, as cruel and relentless, as ever cursed the nations of the Old World.

Having noticed the bearing of these fundamental truths upon the government and the legislation of a land, let us now examine them more particularly in their application to the moral and Christian citizen. In this day of excitement and ultraism, both for and against the laws of the land, it becomes the true patriot to cling to the eternal principles of rectitude, if he can discover them, with unyielding tenacity. In his earthly existence, man sustains a threefold relation — to God; to the world; and to himself. His rela-

tion to God is supreme. This obligation binds him to regard others as he does himself; always, however, being in subjection to the Divine law. Now it so happens, in the progress of time, that the general welfare of the community demands a civil government. It is formed. It gives birth to legal enactments. It is bound, as we have seen, to produce just and impartial laws; laws not in conflict with the claims of God upon man. It was for this that God gave it existence. This is its proper mission: "To form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity." This is consonant with the highest law. But what if it depart from its legitimate authority, and, assuming supreme power over its subjects, enact laws in direct conflict with the commands of the universal Sovereign? Does it then annihilate the relation of the citizen to the Supreme Ruler? Does it destroy his obligation to obey God rather than man? I unhesitatingly answer, *It does not. It can not.* It may make many oppressive exactions upon us, it may treat its subjects cruelly, and they may be under obligation to submit. But when it requires the citizen to do what is plainly in conflict with God's commands, there is no alternative for the *good man*, but steadfastly to refuse obedience, and quietly submit to whatever unrighteous penalty shall be inflicted. If, like an ancient king, it shall legislate some idol into existence, and send forth its edict through all the provinces, commanding all men to bow down and worship it, and some conscientious and God-fearing citizens shall rise up and say, "Be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up," shall we pronounce such a decision rash and reprehensible? — shall we say that the furnace, seven times heated, is just the place for them? Shall we, with certain divines, of late, substantiate our position by quotations of Scripture thus italicised, "Submit yourselves to *every* ordinance of man for the *Lord's* sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well?" Would not this be a most barefaced perversion of the words of the apostle, inculcating a sentiment which the issue of the event most substantially condemns?

Again: suppose another Darius should be called to assume the reins of government, and "all the governors, and the princes, the

counsellors, and the captains" of the kingdom, should consult together, and "establish a royal statute and make a firm decree," which was to be as "final" as the "law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not," and some Daniel, "after he knew that the writing was signed," should go forth, and three times a day deliberately disobey it, on the ground that it plainly commanded him to do what conflicted with the laws of his God, should we join in the cry, Away with him to the lion's den? And should we attempt to justify such barbarous inhumanity by quoting the words of Christ, "Render unto Cesar the things that are Cesar's?" And what better than this are many of the homilies now proclaimed in the ears of a Christian community? No wonder that many good men are indignant at so strange and alarming a perversion of the word of God.

The truth is, that if any civil law commands the citizen to *act* in opposition to the requirements of his God, he is justified in refusing, provided he unresistingly submits to the penalty which the State shall inflict. This the Quakers have done for years, yet who esteems them any the less patriotic. I am astonished that any one can be found, who has the least regard for the word of God, that will deny this principle. Men may ridicule the idea of a "higher law" to their heart's content. They may stigmatize it as a "cant expression," and load it with the most opprobrious epithets; but dare any Christian man say that the claims of God's law are not superior to human enactments? Dare any man say, with the Bible open in his hand, there is no law higher than that enacted by the civil ruler? As we have seen, good men of old believed there was, and acted accordingly. The apostles believed there was, and *that* they would obey at all hazards. Christian martyrs, of every age, poured out their life's blood in support of this principle. And shall we now denounce them as traitors,—men stirring up strife and sedition? They were not excitors of the mob spirit. They quietly obeyed the laws of God, as they were morally bound to do, and then left the consequences in his hand; and he honored their trust. If they suffered, "it was for righteousness' sake." "And blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you *falsely*, for my sake; for great is your reward in heaven." I repeat it: I am surprised, that a doctrine so perfectly evident, both from the very nature of

the case, and from the many examples on record in its favor, should ever be denied or doubted. And I have been more surprised, that ministers of the gospel, while urging the citizen in general terms to obey civil law, — to which I give my most cordial and hearty approbation, — should overlook this all-important point, or pass over it as lightly as possible, lest they might have to encounter the hostility of some violent, ultra conservative.

Nothing is more evident, than that it is the duty of every good citizen to obey the laws of the land. But to say, because this is a duty, generically, therefore there can be no specific exception, is a mark of the greatest folly. And to quote Scripture in proof of such a doctrine, denotes a recklessness of moral principle, or an ignorance of the principles of interpretation, which deserves the severest censure. Suppose some tyrannical parent should command his child to refrain from prayer, to lie and steal, to profane the name of God, and murder the helpless, or even to make a mock of religion; and when reasoned with in regard to the unjust nature and wickedness of such a demand, should reply: “Do you know what you are doing? This authority is vested in me by God himself. I have his express word to bear me out. Says the apostle Paul, ‘Children, obey your parents *in all things*; for this is *well-pleasing* unto the *Lord*.’” What would some of our moralists, with their own reasonings before them, say in reply? The fact is, there is a higher law for the child than the parent’s dictum. While the parent requires what is consonant with the will of God, he is to be obeyed, implicitly. But the moment he commands his child to do what he believes to be a violation of his duty to God, that instant is the child absolved from his obligation to obey, so far as that sinful requirement is concerned.

Now, this is precisely the relation of the citizen to the government. When the Bible speaks of rulers as possessing authority, and of subjects as being under obligation to submit, it always presupposes that they will decree what is consonant with the revealed will of God. That they will have regard to that eternal principle of moral equity, which *alone* brings a law home to the consciences of men, with an inherent power to create the obligation of obedience. If any Christian community, tolerably enlightened, are to be swayed by civil law, it must not only come with authority, — with the bayonet, or the prison, or the halter; but it must bear upon its

face *truth*, and *justice*, and *moral equity*. You cannot go to a community of enlightened freemen, and assume that they are a company of brutes, and will cringe before the rod of the magistrate, and tamely submit to the dictate of a manifestly cruel and oppressive law. The blood of the old Puritan boils anew at such an insult to good sense and moral principle. If you wish laws to be obeyed by the mass, without any question as to their justice, and the righteousness of their requirements, you must go to the land of despotism, superstition, and ignorance. In a land like this, civil enactments which conflict with the religious sentiment of the community come into existence with the sentence of death stamped upon them. They cannot live. They may be bolstered up a few days. They may be kept along by the administration of nauseous and repulsive drugs; but their doom is sealed. They must meet the ordeal of an enlightened and Christian public sentiment,—of the pulpit, and the press, and the ballot-box. And in this way, without mobs, without insurrection, without popular tumult, legal mistakes may be rectified, unjust and wicked laws repealed. This is the glory of republicanism. Our rulers and legislators are made and unmade by the popular voice. If they persist in forcing upon the people such laws as they believe to be wrong, to violate the spirit of the Divine law, the people *will agitate the subject*, until public sentiment set the matter right. How is it in regard to questions which have already passed through this ordeal? A few years since merchants were everywhere licensed to sell intoxicating drinks. The wave of intemperance rolled with desolation over the entire extent of our land, without meeting a barrier. The civil law both countenanced and sustained this dreadful business. At last, the eyes of some few began to be opened to the enormous wrong; to the fearful injury which was inflicted upon a portion of the community, only to gratify the sordid avarice of the seller. They raised the note of alarm. They were greeted with hisses and groans, with brickbats, and still more offensive missiles. They were scouted as fanatics and ultra-ists; men of one idea; mischief-making and mob-exciting men. They were put down as far as possible by might. But right was on their side. They brought the truth of reason and of God to bear upon the accursed traffic, and the leaven began to work, and soon the law was repealed, in spite of the opposition which arose from every quarter. It is quite amusing to turn back and examine

some sermons and speeches delivered about that time : some learned biblical exegesis to sustain the rumseller ; some eloquent legal effort to prop up a doomed cause. And it is a remarkable fact, that many who are now among the foremost in proclaiming the sanctity of human law, have done their utmost to break down the authority of this law. They were ready enough to test the constitutionality of it. They could plead most learnedly and eloquently in defence of those who violated it. If their influence had been brought to bear in support of this righteous law, as it has since for a most unjust and cruel one, intemperance would have well-nigh ceased in the State.

Shall these men now complain, if citizens, loving justice, turn the tables upon them and say, If it was right, and no treason, for you to make the most strenuous exertion to prevent putting a good law in force, which happened to be odious to you, it certainly cannot be wrong for us, under law, to labor to repeal a most inhuman and wicked statute ? We put this matter home to the consciences of certain men who have recently become so furious in advocating the sanctity of human law. We should remember that a praiseworthy reverence for law is a " general principle, and not an isolated fact." It does not allow men to throw every possible obstruction in the way of executing a law which they dislike, and at the same time permit them to proclaim themselves, par excellence, the defenders of the constitution. It does not sanction men in hurling their anathemas against the citizens of Massachusetts, because they seek to repeal a law which they believe to be morally wrong, while, at the same time, they silently wink at the constant violation of constitutional obligations by a sister State. It cannot be denied, but that these violent demonstrations in favor of the supremacy of civil law, " in whatever event and at whatever cost," come with rather an ill grace from men who are notorious for trampling under foot our usury laws, and the constitutional obligations of one State towards the citizens of another ; who violate the post-office laws of the United States ; who offer rewards for free Northern citizens, that they may lynch them ; who imprison Northern seamen, and sell them into slavery. How can we respect the *refined sensibility* of such men ? How give them credit for integrity, when their regard for the Union goes no farther than to uphold a law in which their pride and self-interest are involved ?

Shall we turn aside from the teaching of such jurists as Blackstone, and moralists as Calvin and Edwards, and the like, to receive wisdom from these new teachers? Let us hear the words of some whom we have long been accustomed to reverence for their profound judgment, their great learning, and consistent piety. Let us see whether the sentiments of the discourse belong to the “new or old school.”

Calvin writes, in his *Institutes of Religion*, b. iv, chap. 20, sect. 32, as follows:—

“In the obedience which we have shown to be due to the authority of governors, it is always necessary to make one exception, and that is entitled to our first attention,—that it do not seduce us from our obedience to him, to whose will the desires of all kings ought to be subject, to whose decrees all their commands ought to yield, to whose majesty all their sceptres ought to submit. If they command anything against him, it ought not to have the least attention; nor, in this case, ought we to pay any regard to all that dignity attached to magistrates; to which no injury is done when it is subjected to the unrivalled and supreme power of God. On this principle Daniel denied that he had committed any crime against the king in disobeying his impious decree (Dan. 6: 22); because the king had exceeded the limits of his office, and had not only done an injury to men, but, by raising his arm against God, had degraded his own authority. * * * *
So far is any praise from being due to the pretext of humility, with which courtly flatterers excuse themselves and deceive the unwary, when they deny that it is lawful for them to refuse compliance with any command of their kings: as if God had resigned his right to mortal men, when he made them rulers of mankind; or as if earthly power were diminished by being subordinated to its Author, before whom even the principalities of heaven tremble with awe. I know what great and present danger awaits this constancy, for kings cannot bear to be disregarded without the greatest indignation; and ‘the wrath of a king,’ says Solomon, ‘is as messengers of death.’ But since this edict has been proclaimed by that celestial herald, Peter, ‘We ought to obey God rather than men,’—let us console ourselves with this thought, that we truly perform the obedience which God requires of us, when we suffer anything rather than deviate from piety. And that our hearts may not fail us, Paul stimulates us with another consideration,—that Christ has redeemed us at the immense price which our redemption cost him, that we may not be submissive to the corrupt desires of men, much less be slaves to their impiety.”

The distinguished Robert Hall has given the world the truth on this matter, in few words:—

“The limits of every duty must be determined by its reasons, and the only ones assigned *here* (Rom. 13) or that *can* be assigned for submission to civil authority, are its *tendency to do good*; wherever, therefore, this shall

cease to be the case, submission becomes absurd, having no longer any *rational view*. But at what time this evil shall be judged to have arrived, or what remedy it may be proper to apply, Christianity does not decide, but leaves to be determined by an appeal to Natural Reason and Right."

Paley is equally clear in regard to the duty of obedience to civil government, as developed by the teaching of the Scriptures: —

"They (the Scriptures) inculcate the *duty*, they do not describe the *extent* of it. They enforce the obligations by the proper sanctions of Christianity, without intending either to enlarge or contract,—without considering, indeed, the limits by which it is bounded. This is, also, the method in which the same apostles enjoin the duty of servants to their masters, of children to their parents, of wives to their husbands: 'Servants, be subject to your masters,' — 'Children, obey your parents in all things,' — 'Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands.' The same concise and absolute form of expression occurs in all these precepts; the same silence as to any exceptions or distinctions; yet no one doubts that the commands of masters, parents, and husbands are often so immoderate, unjust, and inconsistent with other obligations, that they both MAY and OUGHT TO BE resisted."

Dr. Hodge, in commenting on the 13th of Romans, examines this whole subject most thoroughly and satisfactorily. He says: —

"The obedience which the Scriptures command us to render to our rulers is not unlimited; there are cases in which *disobedience is a duty*. This is evident, first, from the very nature of the case. The command to obey magistrates is, from its nature, a command to obey them as magistrates in the exercise of their rightful authority. No one doubts that the precept, 'Children, obey your parents in all things,' is a command to obey them in the exercise of their rightful parental authority, and imposes no obligation to implicit and passive obedience. Secondly, from the fact that the same inspired men who enjoin, in such general terms, obedience to rulers, themselves uniformly and openly disobeyed them whenever their commands were inconsistent with other and *higher obligations*. 'We ought to obey God rather than men,' was the principle which the early Christians avowed, and on which they acted. There are cases, therefore, in which disobedience is a duty. *No command to do anything morally wrong can be binding*. The right of deciding on all these points, and determining where the obligation to obedience ceases, and the duty of resistance begins, MUST, FROM THE NATURE OF THE CASE, REST WITH THE SUBJECT AND NOT WITH THE RULER. The apostles and early Christians decided this point for THEMSELVES, and did not leave the decision with the Jewish or Roman authorities."

Says President Edwards: "Rulers are bound to rule in the fear of God, and for the good of the people; and if they do not, then in *resisting them we are doing God service*."

There is no end to sentiments of this character proclaimed by

divines of every age. They clearly reveal what the Christian doctrine on this subject has ever been. They show the true position of those who now attempt, by ridicule, by legal subtleties, and by a perversion of Scripture, to destroy the feeling, that the claims of God's law are superior to the conflicting claims of any civil statute.

Permit me, my friends, in closing the discussion of this subject, to apply the principles here developed to the recent act of Congress, called "The Fugitive Slave Bill." For it is to this law that all thoughts are now turned. The great question with all good men is, What shall *I* do in regard to it? Am I morally bound to give it my approbation and support? Must I silently acquiesce in it, or, in every scriptural way and by all lawful means, seek its repeal, and expose its true nature?

Taking the fundamental principles of the Divine administration, as above stated, for our rule of action, duty becomes plain. The only question for us to decide, is, what is the real character of this Bill when tested by the law of God. If its spirit is in harmony with the moral law; if its requirements in no way conflict with the eternal principles of moral rectitude, and the express obligations of man to obey the law of his Supreme Sovereign, then the directions of the sacred writers to subjects of civil government are binding upon us. We must obey, or incur the fearful penalty which God denounces against such as trample his own authority beneath their feet. But if, on the other hand, it array the subject in opposition to the requirements of Heaven,—if it command the subject to *do* what God bids him *never do*, or compels him *not* to do what God declares he shall,—then it demands of its subject to do wrong, and that he cannot do without subjecting himself to the terrible retributions of an insulted Sovereign. In this case he is bound as a good citizen to labor for its repeal, to show its iniquity; and if it be necessary as the subject of God's law to refuse to obey, and quietly endure the penalty. This we believe to be the teaching of reason and of the word of God. With this accord all the acts of the apostles and holy men in former ages. This is the doctrine, as we have seen, which our standard writers lay down, both judicial and ecclesiastical. Now, it will not be strange if good men do not see alike in regard to the character of this law. We are so liable to be warped in our decisions by our wishes; we are so much accustomed to let

others do our thinking for us, and to feel that we must go where great men lead, that we are very likely to adopt their sentiments, whether right or wrong. To look upon learned casuistry as sound argument; assumptions, as facts. But such a course will not excuse immoral action, at the bar of God. You, my hearer, cannot plead there, that others trampled the principles of justice beneath their feet, and therefore you were justified in doing the same. For God has expressly commanded, that "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to *do evil*." He has given you his law. You know the general spirit of his revealed will. That he has said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment." "And the *second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*." Now let us examine some of the specifications of this Bill by the principles here laid down, as well as by some direct requirements of God in regard to the same subject.

I have not time, neither is it necessary, to enter upon a minute, detailed examination of the law as a whole. It will be sufficient for our purpose to look at some of its main features. And in this department, I shall confine myself to the moral rather than the constitutional character of the Bill; for it is to this that this discussion looks. The Divine law says: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." And Christ has most satisfactorily answered the query, "Who is my neighbor?" No one will contend that it shuts out the fugitive. If he comes to us charged with no crime, seeking an asylum, peaceable and well-disposed, I ask, if this command of God does not lay every man under obligation to treat *him* as he feels morally bound to treat other men, and as he would wish others to treat himself? Most surely it does. But does *this law*? Examine this point. In this State we have no slaves. Every man, therefore, is legally presumed to be a *freeman* until he is *proved* to be a slave. The constitution grants no power to any State or individual to carry a free citizen into a state of bondage for no crime. Before, then, a man can be justly given up, he must be *proved* to be a fugitive slave. This involves a *trial on the question of fact*. Now, are we not morally bound to give to this man the same kind of trial, on this question of fact as to whether he is a slave or not, that we give to others and claim for ourselves? Should we hold it to be morally right for a judge to pronounce sentence, after hearing only what the plaintiff has

to say? What would be thought of the righteousness of such a procedure toward ourselves? The fact is, the Fugitive Slave Law, to all intents and purposes, consigns a man, free in our State, to the most abject slavery, without trial in accordance with the laws of the land. And this is a direct violation of the Divine law. A fugitive from *justice*, is delivered up *to be tried by an impartial jury*, with all the securities of a freeman. But not so in this case. What possible chance has he for such a trial, when once within the hands of the master? None at all. This is injustice. It is inhumanity. It is a plain violation of God's law. Behold the commissioner, hurrying through the farce of a trial, hardly waiting for the panting fugitive to obtain friendly counsel, because the law requires "summary" proceedings, and, with Robespierre-like despatch, handing him over to the slave-hunter! Is this the way we treat others, and wish to be treated ourselves? What shall we say of the moral character of such proceedings against a poor, weak, and defenceless brother, when we read the words of Christ, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye *the same unto them?*"

Again: This law commands me "to aid and assist" in arresting this supposed fugitive, under the severest penalties for refusal. And this too, when it is well-nigh an absolute certainty that, if his skin be black, he will be hurried into slavery without an opportunity to prove himself a freeman. Look at the case which actually occurred in Detroit, where the respondent declared himself a free man, and prayed for a little delay till he could send to a neighboring city for his free papers; but was told by the commissioner, "*that even free papers, from the very man that claimed him, would be of no avail; for where the law made the evidence 'conclusive,' nothing could rebut it.*" Look at the case which took place a little time since in Philadelphia. The man is delivered up upon the testimony of those employed for the purpose of securing him, against strong evidence in favor of his freedom; and when delivered into the hand of his supposed master, proves not to be his slave. Now a law must be an unjust one, which commits the greatest possible wrong upon a man, with scarcely a possibility of escape. What man of you would submit your liberty to such a test? And if you would not permit your child to be seized; if you would not "aid and assist" in seizing him yourself, and in dragging

him before the commissioner, because you believed it to be wrong, and a violation of every principle of justice, what moral right have you to do that to another? But God has given a command that meets this very case. He has said, "Thou shalt *not* deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee; he shall dwell *with* thee, even among you, in that place which he shall choose in one of thy gates, where it liketh him best. THOU SHALT NOT OPPRESS HIM." Now if this principle was just and consonant with the will of God in those dark times, what shall we say of a law in this *nineteenth century*, which inculcates and enforces, under the direst pains, a course of conduct directly the reverse? God is always against the oppressor, and on the side of the oppressed. Therefore he says, "Hide the outcasts; bewray not him that wandereth." "Let mine outcasts dwell with thee; be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler." What does God say in regard to this very occasion, which calls his people to his sanctuary? "Is not this the fast I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?" But this law forbids us to do this towards a large class of our fellow-beings. If anything is done to hide the outcast, to bring him into thy house, to clothe and feed him, and send him on his way to a land of freedom, this law subjects the citizen, so aiding the suspected one, "to a fine of not over one thousand dollars, and imprisonment six months!" "It therefore makes acts of hospitality and gospel mercy to the unhappy fugitive a crime for which the agent may be severely punished." Is this the spirit of the gospel of the Prince of Peace? Can a man be actuated by the spirit of this gospel, and carry out the requirements of this Fugitive Law? If so, I have studied the Divine Word to little purpose.

But one of the most insulting and degrading features of this Bill is, that it holds out a bribe to the officer of justice to do a great wrong. If the man is declared a freeman, the fee is but half as much as if he is sentenced to bondage; while it is evident to any one, that a trial which should result in freedom would ordinarily employ far more time and trouble. The fact is, no one can read

the specifications of this act without being made to feel, that the whole design of it is to secure the fugitive, or some black man in his place, without regard to justice or moral principle. And the instances which are continually occurring in the execution of the law, reveal most distinctly its immoral and wicked character. We have already referred to two.

“To arrest a fugitive slave,” is a very harmless expression as it falls upon the ear; but terrible beyond description as it actualizes itself upon some trembling victim of oppression. Witness the agony of separation between husbands and wives, parents and children; the sundering of the dearest ties; Christians dragged forcibly from the altars where they have consecrated their offspring to a God of mercy; from the graves where they have consigned the dearest of earth; ministers of the gospel, driven from their congregations to seek a shelter in foreign climes under the more humane rule of royalty! Listen to the following, as recently published in the “Religious Herald,” and since confirmed by letters from the fugitive himself:—

“An illustration of the civilization and Christianity embodied in the Fugitive Slave Bill, has recently come to our knowledge. The Rev. Dr. Pennington, pastor of the Shiloh Presbyterian church in New York city, has been for two years past in Great Britain. Many of his friends have wondered that he did not return. The reason has now transpired. He has written to a legal gentleman in this city to know whether it will be *safe* for him to return. He is a fugitive slave, having escaped from Maryland some twenty years ago; and fears that, if he resumes his ministerial labors in New York, he will be seized, parted from his wife,—an estimable woman whom he married in this city,—dragged from his church, and sent to a Southern plantation. We had supposed that he had purchased himself, and was in possession of free papers, but it appears that we were mistaken.

“Think of this, professors of the religion of Jesus Christ,—members of the church which he purchased with his blood! Your brother Christian, a minister of the blessed Saviour, is driven from his pastoral labors, and forced to shelter himself in a foreign land, lest, under the operation of our laws, which both the leading political parties are pledging themselves to maintain, he should be doomed to a life of slavery! What must the Saviour think of a law, or of an article in the constitution as generally interpreted, which delivers up one of his ministers as a prey to the oppressor? Would the iniquity be greater if for Rev. Dr. Pennington we should substitute Rev. Dr. Spring, of the same city? Not at all. Yet what exclamations of horror would go forth, if Dr. Spring should be forced to flee the country for no crime, but merely because the law allowed the editor of the ‘New York Observer’ to claim and hold him as property. We read of the barbarous customs of former ages, and thank God that we do not live in such times of

darkness, while there are deeds transacted under our eyes which are worthy of the darkest days of Rome, pagan or papal. We receive persecuted Christians from Madeira; and send our own refugees to Canada and Great Britain! We put it to the conscience of every Christian, Do you believe it would be right to drag Dr. Pennington back to slavery? We trust not. A law that would send our brother Pennington into slavery never proceeded from God, and comes clothed with no Divine authority."

Here is a practical illustration of the workings of this law. Its cruel features can only be seen as they thus realize themselves. One of its most terrible effects is everywhere noticed in its demoralizing tendency. It blunts the moral sensibility to injustice and inhumanity. It causes men to forget the words they have uttered in defence of human rights, and to proclaim new and conflicting doctrines. It trifles with the religious feeling of a large and most respectable portion of the community. And in the language of Mr. Webster, I would say, "*He is a rash man indeed, little conversant with human nature, and especially has he a very erroneous estimate of the character of the people of this country, who supposes that a feeling of this kind is to be trifled with, or despised.*" And when we recur to his eloquent pleadings in behalf of oppressed Greece; when we listen to his outburst of indignation in view of Austrian cruelty, and behold in his many speeches, his massive and overpowering argument in defence of the great principles of human liberty, we can but utterly detest this "Fugitive Slave Bill," which so outrages every noble sentiment that he has uttered in behalf of the oppressed of earth. We cannot but labor and pray that God may hasten its doom. For pass away it must. The law of God condemns it. The whole spirit of the gospel is against it. The religious feeling of the community will not tolerate it; and even its friends are its apologists. They dare not attempt to defend it on its inherent virtue. Pass away it must, so sure as there is a righteous Sovereign in the universe. And we pray, God speed it to its destiny.

Finally: If that spirit which now seeks to sustain this law, by weakening the authority of God's word over the consciences of men, is to be fostered and applauded, this nation will rue the day in which she consummated this unnatural deed. For nations are no less amenable to the God of heaven than individuals. It is he that saith, "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." He has denounced the most fearful woes against

the nation who lend themselves to sustain oppression, and who trample upon the rights of the weak and defenceless. "For among my people are found wicked men; they lay wait, as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men. Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?"

The truth is, my hearers, the whole people must do right. They must do right as a nation, in their civil enactments, if they expect the smiles of God's favor. Both profane and sacred history proclaim, in notes of startling eloquence, the doom of that nation which recklessly disregards its obligations to the law of God. And this is one great reason why good men oppose this law. They well know that the most powerful fleets and armies, the most consummate skill of politicians, cannot save a nation when God shall decree its overthrow because of its cruelty. Therefore they watch, with a jealous eye, the first steps which lead to so dreadful an issue. They seek to inform the public mind, to arouse the public conscience, and lead the multitude back to the eternal law of right. It is a false and dangerous assumption that such efforts threaten the dissolution of the Union. Are we Christians, and believe this? What! a nation trembling lest it crumble in pieces because it is about to obey the statute of Jehovah! A Christian people seeking safety by forsaking the counsels of the Almighty to trust in the teachings of fallible and wicked men! AWAY WITH SUCH A DELUSION! It is true, there are dangers in our way. There are many and serious evils, that awaken the deepest solicitude in the hearts of good men, threatening the stability and permanence of our civil institutions. There is an awful incongruity in our profession and practice as a nation. Our land is the professed soil of freedom, and blessed with the purest system of law man ever formed; and yet, millions of our fellow-beings are doomed to unrequited toil and bondage, the most abject, cruel, and oppressive. Say what we will, the system of slavery as it now exists is agitating this country to its centre. If the friends of freedom move for its extinction in a lawful way, and where they have a constitutional control of it, the abettors of this system are clamorous for disunion. If it remains, it will eat out the very heart and soul of this Republic. What shall we do? Let us seek wisdom of God. Hold up the unchanging principles of his law. Be sure that we

obey him; that we are not driven by threats, or ridicule, or sophistry, to believe the law of man superior in its claims to the law of God. Let us steadfastly obey and support all righteous laws. Let us discountenance all riot and popular tumult, and, by a calm and fearless declaration of the truth, put our enemies to shame, and show to all men that we "*Fear God, and honor the king.*"

My friends: I leave this subject with your own consciences. May the God of infinite justice and wisdom prepare you and enable you to act, so as to meet the plaudit, "Well done, good and faithful servant," and to enter into that blessed abode where all, of every name and clime, are one in the Lord.



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